



HOME FRONT WARRIORS

CIVILIAN WORKERS KEEP WAR MACHINES BATTLE READY

STORY BY STAFF SGT. MATTHEW ROSINE
PHOTOS BY TECH. SGT. LARRY SIMMONS

Maintainers from the 501st Aircraft Sustainment Squadron and the Royal Jordanian Air Force work to re-engineer the cooling duct on an F-16 Fighting Falcon at the Ogden Air Logistics Center, Utah.

A loud alarm clock rings Tina Stalker-Betts' 3:45 a.m. wake-up call. It's time for her to get up, go to work and serve her country, again.



Ogden Air Logistics Center sheet metal mechanic Tina Stalker-Betts.

Her husband, Mike, sleeps in because he works the swing shift. After letting the dogs out, she grabs a pot of “leaded” coffee before getting ready for work.

But, Mrs. Stalker-Betts doesn’t put on a military uniform. Instead, the C-130 Hercules sheet metal mechanic at Utah’s Ogden Air Logistics Center dons overalls and work boots as the morning news anchor brings her up to speed on local events. She’s now ready to start her day, getting her hands dirty supporting America’s warfighters.

“Whenever Airmen go into combat overseas, we are a part of that because we work on their aircraft,” said the 45-year-old grandmother of five from Oscoda, Mich. “We are not just people out there somewhere. We are behind them. We are Americans and they trust us to do our jobs as much as we trust them to do their jobs.”

Mrs. Stalker-Betts helps keep Air Force aircraft flying in the war on terrorism, along with more than 20,000 other civilian workers at Hill Air Force Base, Utah. Civilians make up about 90 percent of the depot’s workforce. The depot is the largest single employer in Utah.

The Ogden depot is not unique. It is part of Air Force Materiel Command’s triumvirate of aircraft maintenance facilities, which also include Warner Robins ALC, Robins Air Force Base, Ga., and Oklahoma City ALC, Tinker Air Force Base, Okla. The Oklahoma City depot is the largest of the three. Together, they provide the Air Force a worldwide maintenance capability.

“If you look across our Air Force, across the globe on any given day and any given operation, AFMC has its fingerprint on just about everything from the aircraft we fly and sustain, right down to the very boots our Airmen wear,” Ogden ALC commander Maj. Gen. Kathie Close said. “The majority of that imprint is directly attributed to the three air logistics centers.”

The work force at the three centers provides depot maintenance, product support, services, supply chain management and oversight of Air Force weapon systems. Together, they support more than 30 weapon systems, 10 Air Force major commands, 93 Air Force bases and 46 foreign nations. To do the job at Ogden takes four wings: 75th Air Base Wing, 84th Combat Sustainment Wing, 309th Maintenance Wing and 508th Aerospace Sustainment Wing.

Civilian ‘Airmen’

At each depot, the civilian workforce is a vital part of the nuts and bolts of the Air Force’s warfighting mission.

At Hill, C-130 Hercules maintenance and the overhaul of A-10 Thunderbolt IIs’ at “Hog Heaven,” are just two of the depot’s key missions. Depot workers also work on the F-22 Raptor, F-16 Fighting Falcon, the A-10 precision engagement and service life extension programs and the C-5 Globemaster III wheel and brake system improvement program.

Airmen work side-by-side with their civilian counterparts, ex-



Ryan Wiggill takes a sample of a green dye that penetrates and reveals cracks in wheels during inspections.



Catherine Knaus formats data bus connectors on wires inside an A-10 Thunderbolt II. A-10 maintainers perform 2,167 continuity checks and 1,200 installation checks on the ground-attack fighter’s wiring systems alone.

cept that there are not as many Airmen on the line.

“It’s not a real big deal to have the numbers [of workers] reversed from what a normal squadron would have,” said Lt. Col. Wallace Addison, the 506th Aircraft Sustainment Squadron commander. “In fact, there are only five military members in the squadron — including myself. It is just a different way of working.”

Hill’s civilian workers know their business, the colonel from Montgomery, Ala., said. They do their part to keep Air Force’s warfighters combat capable and embody the Air Force core values. Their dedication and service stands out, he said.

In July 2006, the 309th Maintenance Wing earned the Gold Level Shingo Prize for Excellence. The award is like the Nobel Prize for manufacturing excellence. Until 2005, only private-sector companies earned the prize.

“Our combined team of Air Force civilians, military members and contractors are returning more

and more aircraft and engines to the warfighters — more front-line capability for the global war on terrorism,” General Close, a self-proclaimed military brat, said. “As an American, it makes me extremely proud of these committed patriots who are working so hard to ensure our warriors have what they need to get the job done.”

The turnaround for each weapon system depends on the kind of work needed. But the workforce understands that each extra day a system spends at the depot, is one more day Airmen will have to do without it.

This year, for the third consecutive year, Ogden’s workforce achieved a 100 percent on-time delivery rate for the common configuration implementation program. This achievement is the workforce’s attempt to improve upon perfection, the colonel said.

Forging the future force

The three depot’s tens of thousands of workers serve their country on the production line. They also help prepare more civilian workers to meet tomorrow’s Air Force missions. That includes implementing Air Force Special Operations for the 21st Century initiatives.

While this program has improved efficiency and cut costs at the multi-billion



C-5 Galaxy mechanic Kevin Bezyack puts nuts and bolts back into storage trays while gathering supplies for a maintenance kit.

dollar depots, the civilian workforce continues to look for innovative ways to serve Airmen.

"We are transforming the force and streamlining processes to help Airmen meet tomorrow's challenges," said General Close, who once served as a lieutenant a Hill's 388th Component Repair Squadron.

To help provide the highest quality of worker, the three depots forged working relationships with local educational institutions. This helps educate technicians to meet Air Force needs and the strict demands on precision and quality at the logistics centers.

This "continuity of quality" is important at Ogden, where the average worker is in his or her late 40s to early 50s. The aim is to ensure these future technicians can continue the center's work ethic in the future.

The center doesn't just work on aircraft and other weapon systems. Its workforce also works with computers, computer software and other emerging technologies.

"We do things here that people never thought we were capable of doing," Kenny Bennett, the 519th Software Maintenance Squadron acting director, said.

The group gives the center a technological fighting edge. With



Aaron Pfaff (top) and Frank Leavitt overhaul a C-5 Galaxy landing gear. The overhauls are part of the Galaxy's wheel and brake system improvement program.

more than 73 percent civilian engineers, it is the first Department of Defense unit to earn a Capability Maturity Model Integration level 5 certification. This means the unit has developed and improved its capacity to recognize, adopt and use the best management and technical practices that allow it to deliver the Air Force the best-quality software it needs to do its mission, on time and at the cheapest cost.

The unit works with computer-based flightline support equipment, space systems, mission planning software, embedded software operational flight programs, common aircraft portable

reprogramming equipment and crypto keys for munitions and avionics software conversions. It supports the computers and software that power aircraft

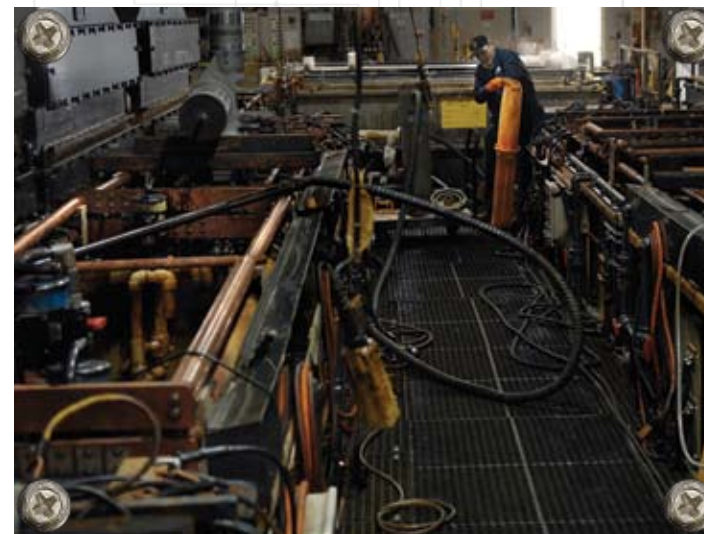
such as the HH-60 Pave Low, B-52 Stratofortress, F-15 Eagles and space systems.

"Honestly, most of our (civilian engineers) could make a lot more money out in industry. But they have a good sense of what they do here," Mr. Bennett, of Ogden, said. "What touched me the most was when an F-16 pilot told me how his computer and software had saved him and 25 ground troops in combat — that was incredible."

"WE BELIEVE IN THE MISSION."



Mike Haskett disassembles aircraft wheels for inspection. The Ogden depot processes all Department of Defense wheels, tires, brakes and landing gears.



Art Terry pulls used filters — used to remove microscopic particles from chrome solutions — from their housing.

Ogden workers face challenges on the home front as they help equip combat Airmen with the best weapons. That means continually educating military and civilian workers.

"We are paving the right path, not only for mission accomplishment, but also for the development and progression of our Airmen," General Close said. "Bottom line: We ensure warfighters are in supreme condition for war, contingency or any other operations the Air Force is involved in."

To accomplish their vital home front mission, Ogden workers — and those at Oklahoma City and Warner Robins — work around the clock. They know the work they do is an integral part of winning the war on terrorism. So the more efficiently they do their job, the faster Airmen get combat-ready weapon systems on the frontlines.

Before heading for work, Mrs. Stalker-Betts lets in her dogs from their early morning outing. It's 5:15 a.m. In 45 minutes she'll be adding her sweat, knowledge and skill to America's warfighting effort — just from her own backyard. It's a duty she doesn't take likely because she takes pride in serving America's combat Airmen.

"They depend on us to send them combat-ready aircraft they can take into combat and return home safely," she said. "My husband works there [at the depot], too. We believe in the mission." ♡



Andrew Ray (foreground) and Al Thomas check an F-16 Block 30 simulator. The contractors work with the 508th Aerospace Sustainment Wing.

